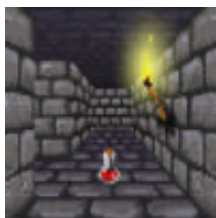


RPG Reload File 030 – 'QuestLord'

[March 19, 2015](#) by [Shaun Musgrave](#)



Hello, gentle readers, and welcome to the **RPG Reload**, the weekly feature where we heal ourselves by eating Lizard On A Stick. Each week, we take a look at an RPG from the increasingly lengthy history of the App Store to see how it holds up in the present day. It's more than that, though. It's also a chance to revisit some good times, and go for a deeper dive than a review typically allows us. Although I'm the captain of this particular ship, once a month I give the helm to one of you, allowing you to select the featured RPG. Simply tell me your choice by commenting below, posting in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#) in the forums, or by tweeting me at [@RPGReload](#).

Through a process of random selection, one of the suggestions will be chosen to be featured in the next reader's choice article. The next one will be **RPG Reload File 032**, which means I'll be rolling the dice next week. Vote now if you're interested.





After covering ports and remakes over the last month in these articles, I felt it was high-time to get back to an iOS original. This week, our featured game is Lava Level's *QuestLord* ([\\$5.99](#)), which hit the App Store in February of 2013. It's a turn-based first-person RPG in the style of games like *The Quest* ([\\$4.99](#)) or *Dungeon Master*, but it does some things that give it its own feel apart from those games. You play as a hero who is dubbed the QuestLord, a title conferred to those who, well, solve a lot of quests, I suppose. There are 18 of them in this game, to be precise, and solving all of them will take you around a pretty big world. While some of that time is spent in dungeons and caves, more of it is spent wandering the great outdoors. The variety of the locations is one of the game's strong points. What I really like best about *QuestLord*, however, is how well it balances between offering a deep experience and keeping the pace quick and easily digestible. It's common for games to go all-in on one or the other, and all too rare for a game that

dangerously tries to ride the center line to be successful at it.

With this being a fairly recent game from a relatively new developer, the history section is probably going to be a little bit shorter than the last couple of articles, but I think that's okay. I actually got in touch with Lava Level to get some background information when my usual ninja techniques failed me. First of all, though the name Lava Level is a fairly new one in the world of gaming, the person behind it, Eric Kinkead, is not. Formerly of Midway and Microsoft, Kinkead initially struck out on his own with a company named Game Titan that largely worked on Game Boy games. The handheld market got pretty rough for Western developers after the iPhone changed everything, as a lot of the contract work that served as bread and butter for smaller developers was drying up as the audience shifted towards iOS. Perhaps that's why, after taking some time working on non-game projects, Kinkead decided to start things fresh on iOS with Lava Level, this time going truly independent as an army of one.

According to Kinkead, when he first started playing around with ideas for the App Store, he was developing simple games with strong casual appeal. At the same time, he was playing a lot of his favorite classic CRPGs, like *Dungeon Master*. He realized that since he was totally on his own, he could make whatever kind of game he wanted to for the first time in ages. His first game had been an RPG for the Atari ST titled *Nervana Quest*, developed with his cousin when he was only in high school. He decided it was time to make a return to the genre he loved so much, and *QuestLord* was born. The idea, as he explained it to me, was that the traditional style of CRPG in the 80s had plenty to offer, but the 90s brought a push for realism, with 3D and digitized graphics, things that ended up taking focus away from the genre's previous strengths. With the resurgence in popularity of pixelated graphics, it became easier for a small developer to go back and re-explore some of those discarded ideas to see if there were alternate ways to go with them. Looking around at the RPG landscape across smart devices, PC indies, and even some of the stuff on console download services, it's hard to argue

against that reasoning.

Kinthead opted to make the game he wanted to play, but he didn't do so with complete disregard for the platform hosting it. The game auto-saves, and you can quit and come back at any time without losing progress. It's also designed to be played one-handed in portrait mode, to make it easier to play on the sly. While some prefer landscape mode, I feel like portrait mode is well-suited to games of this type. The UI is always going to need some space for dungeon-crawlers, and being able to access everything one-handed is a great thing in a rigidly turn-based game. Although he didn't explicitly say it, I feel like the game's design is also informed by this pick up and play thinking. It's a fairly easy game as long as you stay on the intended rails, which are pretty hard to jump off of even if you wanted to, and the overall adventure is broken down into someone discrete chunks. It's easy to fire the game up, play for a short while, and make useful progress on the overall goal without feeling like you've left things undone that you may forget about next time you play. It's equally easy to sit down and bang out several parts in a row without it feeling disjointed.

My fellow TouchArcadian and co-host of the [RPG Reload Podcast](#), Eric Ford, praised the game's approachability [in his review](#). He found it to be a nice entry point for someone intimidated by what is admittedly a sometimes frightening sub-genre. He had some concerns about how enjoyable the game would be for a more veteran player, but as someone who appreciates a good dungeon crawl, I will happily endorse what's going on in *QuestLord*. It's not hard, but its pace makes it a fun romp anyway. Those who want a slightly stiffer challenge can take on the QuickGame mode, which adds some rogue-like elements like permadeath and randomly-generated dungeons. It's still nothing that a little preparation and cool thinking can't deal with most of the time, though. Adding to this friendly nature, the game gives you an automap that not only fills in the path you walk along, but also any interesting things you might pass by, even if you yourself don't notice them.

That can happen pretty easily if you're not careful. You're playing from a first person point of view, but the world is built out of squares, so you move along one step at a time. The way the screen scrolls, it's sometimes hard to see things beside you, and if you're using a shield, you might not notice things under your feet, either. The game highlights the button that takes you to the pick-up screen if anything is there, so keep that in mind if you're using a big shield. It would be incredibly easy to get lost were it not for the auto-map, so even though I like to draw maps myself in some games, I'm happy to have it done for me here. It's easy to see when you've cleared a whole area and can safely move on to the next without worrying you've missed something important. There are some secrets hidden around, however, and you'll have to poke around a bit to find those. The game never hides anything mission-critical that way, but there are some highly desirable pieces of gear and magic that you can only get by investigating carefully.

QuestLord hits the sweet spot when it comes to gear, in my opinion. There's just enough that it feels exciting to head into a new shop or discover something in a dungeon, but not so much that you have to start juggling things around for min-maxing. There are three main stats to worry about, with three playable races that can take advantage of them in various ways. Humans start with the most money and have good strength, decent defense, and somewhat weak magic skills. They also start in a somewhat disadvantageous location, requiring you to best a fairly tough boss in the first dungeon and travel a long distance and back again to gain access to teleportation magic. Dwarves, on the other hand, have decent power, great defense, and poor magic skills. Their starting location is great, though, and you'll have little reason to backtrack after setting out from there. Elves have great magic skills, but their other stats are quite average. They start near the location of the spellbook that you need to start learning magic, and will likely never need to backtrack as a result. Because of the different starting points, the early part of the game is quite different for each of the three, but depending on how you allocate your points from gaining levels, the latter part of the game tends to be very similar.

While that hurts the replay value some, the QuickGame mode makes up for it quite a bit. Playing as one of three pre-rolled named characters from the main campaign, you have to try to survive as long as you can in a randomly-generated dungeon. The game features GameCenter leaderboards for each character, and it's fun to compete with friends or even just yourself in this mode. I found it to be my go-to mode after beating the main story a couple of times. Coming in around the ten-hour mark, the main game isn't terribly long, but I find its length fits it well. This is meant to be a fast-paced adventure, and single-character dungeon crawls can get pretty boring if they drag out too long. What's amazing is that in all that time, the game regularly throws new visuals at you. You'll stumble across monsters you've never seen hours into the game, and the graphical themes change up quite regularly. Whether you'll find beauty in them depends on how well the game's pixelated style meshes with you, but I found them quite lovely. The monster death animations in particular are very good.

For me, the coolest part of the game is how it's structured, though. I really like going into a new area, gathering up all the quests, and then methodically solving them to open up the next area. There's something pleasing on a very basic level about all of it. The combat is very simple with few options unless you're using a magic build, but the simple swiping back and forth, like you're sweeping monsters out with a broom, also feels very enjoyable in a primal sort of way. There's a sequel on the way that I hope opens up the combat a bit more, but *QuestLord* has a certain compelling rhythm to it that I can't deny. It also wisely packs in the secrets, and even if you talk to everyone and carefully comb over all the hints, there are still things you are just going to stumble upon. That joyous feeling of discovery is one of the things I live for in an RPG.

If you're looking for something with a similar sort of appeal to *The Quest* but with a lighter bite, *QuestLord* is a really great choice. I'd also highly recommend it to anyone who is interested in this style of game but usually finds them too intimidating to get into. It's a satisfying game with a gentle

difficulty curve, full of fun secrets and cool locations to uncover. The personality of the game shines through nicely, as well. There's a real sense of the developer's hand in it, and that's something that's always a positive from my point of view. It also works nicely on modern devices even though its last update was over a year ago. For a couple of dollars, it's definitely worth the plunge in my books.



That's just my take on *QuestLord*, though. What do you think? I want to hear your opinions on this one, because I know for sure some of our regular readers have played it. Please don't forget to vote while you're at it, because we haven't had too many this time around, and that makes me a sad boy. All you need to do is comment below, post in the [Official RPG Reload Club thread](#), or tweet me at [@RPGReload](#). As for me, I'll be back next week with another great RPG from the archives. Thanks as always for reading, everyone!

Next Week's Reload Hint: *It's not quite a blue harvest, but we'll take it.*